INTRODUCTION

THE *Discourse To The Greeks* has come down to us in two manuscripts, the first of which, the Greek *Codex Argentoratensis* (gr. 9, of the thirteenth or fourteenth century), was completely destroyed by fire at Strassburg on August 24, 1870.[1] The other manuscript, of the seventh century (*Cod. Syr.* Add. 14658, now preserved in the British Museum), contains a Syriac version of the *Discourse* under the name of Ambrosius.[2]

In this short apology of five chapters, the author explains the motives which prompted him to embrace Christianity —motives which were based upon his abhorrence of the immoralities connected with Greek mythology and the pagan festivals. He concludes his *Discourse* by appealing to the Greeks to follow his example and become Christians.

It is doubtful whether it was written by St. Justin.[3] The date of this expose of pagan depravity must rather be placed between the last half of the second century and the first quarter of the third. The style is definitely not Justinian; furthermore, the author gives as the reason for his conversion to Christianity his aversion to heathen immoralities. St. Justin[4] attributes his conversion to an intimate study of the prophets of the Old Testament together with the profound impression made upon him by the constancy of Christians in face of torture and death.

1 For a description of this Codex, see Migne, *PG* 6.222.
2 Cf. W. Cureton, *Spicilegium Syriacum* (London 1855) 38-42; 61-69.
3 Cf. W. Smith and H. Wace, A Dictionary of Christ. Biography 3.365 for the difference of opinion regarding its genuineness.
4 Cf. *Dial. w. Tr.* 7.

The texts used for this translation are those of Migne, *PG* 6.229-240, and of J. C. T. von Otto, *Corpus Apologetarum Christianorum saeculi secundi* (Jena 1879) III 2-18.

CONTENTS

Chapter		*Page*
1	Justin's abhorrence of Greek customs	431
2	Evils perpetrated by Greek gods	432
3	Additional evils of the Greek gods	433
4	Sinful customs of the Greeks themselves	435
5	Concluding exhortation to the Greeks	435

DISCOURSE TO THE GREEKS

Chapter 1

DO NOT IMAGINE, my Greek friends, that I am rash and unreasonable in refusing to practice your customs, for I have discovered that they are in no way holy or pleasing to God. Indeed, the very writings of your poets stand as permanent testimonials of madness and perversity. Whoever becomes a pupil of your most learned one[1] encounters more difficulties than any man ever faced. Because, first of all, they[2] affirm that Agamemnon, in assisting his brother's sensuality with great madness and unrestrained passion, did not hesitate to hand over his own daughter[3] to be immolated. Furthermore, to rescue Helen, carried away by the leprous shepherd, he disturbed all Greece. But when captives were taken during the ensuing war, Agamemnon himself was captivated by Chryseis, and because of another girl, Briseis, he became an enemy of Thetis' son.[4] And that great hero of yours, the son of Peleus,[5] who constrained the river, conquered Troy and vanquished Hector, became the slave of Polyxena, and was overcome by a dead Amazon.[6] Replacing his divinely-made armor with a wedding garment, he became a love victim in the temple of Apollo. And the

1 Homer.
2 The grammarians who interpreted the Homeric poems.
3 Iphigeneia.
4 Achilles.
5 Achilles. Cf. *Iliad* 21.24ff., 243ff.
6 Achilles was filled with remorse when he perceived the beauty of the Amazon whom he had mortally wounded in battle.

Ithacan Ulysses even made evil appear as virtue. Indeed, in sailing by the realm of the Sirens, he showed that he lacked sufficient prudence when he could not trust his own good sense to close his ears.[7] Then there is the example of the son of Telamon, Ajax, that strong man whose shield was covered with seven ox hides, but who, when defeated by Ulysses in the contest for the weapons [of Achilles], went stark mad. I have not the slightest desire to be taught such things. Nor do I aspire to attain such a state of mind that I should believe these Homeric myths. For the whole epic poem, both the beginning and end of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey,* revolves about one theme—woman.

Chapter 2

And as to Hesiod, who, after Homer, wrote his *Works and Days,* who will agree with his futile theogony? For he says that Saturn, the son of heaven, deposed his own father of his reign and took over his sceptre, and that, panic-stricken lest he suffer the same fate, he decided to eat his own children. But Jupiter, through the cunning of Curetes, was taken away and hidden. Later, he returned to take his father prisoner in chains and to divide his kingdom. On this occasion it is said that Jupiter received the air; Neptune, the sea; and Pluto, the portion of Hades. And Pluto carried away Proserpine, while Ceres wandered about in the wilderness, in search of her daughter. Even this myth was exalted by the Eleusinian fire.[1] Not only did Neptune assault Melanippe when she was drawing water, but he also debased a great number of mermaids[2] whose names are too numerous to mention.

7 Instead, he had himself bound to the mast of his ship.

1 The annual return of Proserpine from the region of the dead was celebrated in the Eleusinian Mysteries.

2 Nereids.

And Jupiter was an adulterer under many guises, for he sinned with Antiope as a satyr, with Danae as [a shower of] gold, with Europa as a bull, and with Leda as a swan. And the love of Semele stimulated both his lewdness and the jealousy of Juno. It is also reported that he carried off the Phrygian Ganymede to serve as his cupbearer. Such were the misdeeds of Saturn's descendants. And your Apollo, that renowned son of Latona, proved himself a liar when he professed to be a soothsayer. For, although he pursued Daphne, he never caught up with her; nor did he warn his beloved Hyacinth, when he pitched the quoit, of his death.[3] And I shall pass over in silence the masculine characteristics of Minerva, the femininity of Bacchus, and the immoral habits of Venus. You Greeks should read aloud to Jupiter the law against parricide, the punishment for adultery, and the stigma of pederasty. Teach Minerva and Diana feminine activities, and show Bacchus how a man should act. What majesty is depicted by the scene of a woman clothed in armor, or of a man in female attire, decorated with cymbals and garlands, and followed by a frenzied mob of female devotees?

Chapter 3

And take the example of Hercules, famous for his three nights[1] and the performance of his labors—Hercules, that son of Jupiter, who killed the lion and the many-headed hydra; who slew the tireless wild boar and scattered the swift man-eating birds; who brought the three-headed dog back from Hades, and cleansed the huge Augean stables of their

3 Apollo killed Hyacinth by accident, when he struck him with a discus.

1 Perhaps a reference to the legend that he had spent three nights in the stomach of a whale.

dirt; who slew the fire-breathing bulls and stag; who gathered the golden fruit from the tree and killed the poisonous serpent (and he also killed Achelous and Busiris, that murderer of his guests—for what reason it is not right to say); who traversed mountains in order to get water which, it is said, rendered one's speech articulate. Yet, this same Hercules, who performed so many wonderful deeds, was childishly pleased to be fascinated by the cymbals of the satyrs, to be enslaved by the love of woman, and to be slapped on the buttocks by the laughing Lydian.[2] And at length, when he could not take off the robe of Nessus,[3] he died, after first having kindled his own funeral pyre. Let Vulcan desist from his envy and jealousy if he is hated because he is old and lame, while Mars is loved because he is young and handsome. Therefore, O Greeks, since your gods have been proved guilty of intemperance and your heroes of effeminacy, the histories described by your dramatic poets clearly show, for example, the curse of Atreus; the couch of Thyestes;[4] the abominable sins of these descendants of Pelops; Danaus, who, drunk with rage and envious of his brother Egyptus, deprived him of his children by murdering his [fifty] sons; and the Thyestean banquets prepared by the Furies. And Procne, under the form of a bird, even to this day laments, and her Athenian sister chirps as best she can with her tongue torn out. Need we mention the goad[5] of Oedipus,

2 Omphale.

3 When Dejaneira, wife of Hercules, heard rumors of his love for Iole, she sent him a robe sprinkled with the poisoned blood of Nessus, whom Hercules had slain. This poison killed Hercules.

4 Thyestes plotted with the wife of his brother, Atreus, to seize the throne from him, but was unsuccessful. After years of exile, Thyestes returned to effect a reconciliation with his brother. Atreus received him kindly, but as revenge he served Thyestes' own son for dinner. This is the so-called Thyestean banquet.

5 This could refer to the means which Oedipus used to blind himself, or to kill his father or it could mean the instrument employed to pierce his ankles when he was a baby.

how he murdered Laius, his father, and married his own mother, and how his sons, who were at the same time his brothers, slaughtered each other?

Chapter 4

I have come to detest even your public festivals. There you indulge in immoderate banquets, listen to finely polished flutes which incite you to lustful actions, and you needlessly submit to elaborate anointings with perfume, while your heads are crowned with flowers. With such an accumulation of evil practices you determine your reverence. With such practices are your minds filled, while your intemperance excites you to Bacchic frenzy, whence you indulge in your customary unholy and mad intercourse. I would like to make another observation. It is this. Why do you, who are Greeks, become angered when your son, in imitation of Jupiter, turns against you and robs you of your own wife? Why do you consider him your enemy, yet worship one [Jupiter] who is like him? Why do you complain of your wife's infidelity, yet honor Venus with temples? If these events had been narrated by others, they could be presumed to have been false and slanderous accusations, but even now your own poets extol them in song, and your histories blatantly describe them.

Chapter 5

Therefore, my Greek friends, come and share in unrivalled wisdom, and receive the teachings of the Divine Word, while you become acquainted with the immortal King; and you will see that they are not heroes who destroy whole nations. For our Leader, the Divine Word, does not demand a strong body and beautiful countenance, or high and noble

birth, but a pure soul, well-grounded in holiness. He demands the password of our King, namely, divine deeds, for the power to perform such deeds is transmitted to the soul through the Word. (O trumpet of peace for a soul that is at war! O weapon that drives away dangerous passions! O precept that extinguishes the natural fire of the soul!) This power of the Word does not make us poets, or learned philosophers, or fluent orators, but it does make us immortal; it makes gods of us mortal men, and it transports us from the earth to the regions above Olympus. Come, therefore, and be instructed. Become as I am, for I was once as you. The divinity of the doctrine and the power of the Word have conquered me. Just as an expert snake charmer puts a dreadful snake to flight after luring it from its hole, so does the Word expel the dreadful passions of our sensual nature from the remote recesses of our soul. First, He drives away lust from which every kind of evil originates, for example, enmities, quarrels, jealousy, intrigues, anger, and the like. Once lust is expelled, tranquillity and peace return to the soul. And once the soul is freed of the evils in which it was immersed, it returns to its Creator. For it is necessary that the soul return to the place from which it came.